

Snohomish County Long Term Care Ombudsman Program

**Frequently Asked Questions**

<b>What is the Long Term Care (LTC) Ombudsman Program?</b>	The LTC Ombudsman Program is intended to improve the quality of life for residents of long term care facilities, including nursing homes, boarding homes, adult family homes and state operated Veterans' homes. The purpose of the program is to promote and protect the rights of residents in long term care facilities.
<b>What is the legal authority of the LTC Ombudsman Program?</b>	The federal Older Americans Act requires all states have a LTC Ombudsman Program and outlines the authority of LTC Ombudsmen. In Washington State, RCW 43.190 and WAC 365-18 outline the laws and regulations of the program. In addition, federal law and Resident Rights statute RCW 70.129 provide Ombudsmen with unrestricted access to long term care facility residents.
<b>Why haven't I heard about the LTC Ombudsman Program before?</b>	The LTC Ombudsman Program has been in Washington State since 1978 and the Snohomish County Program was established in 1997. It is a requirement that all licensed nursing, boarding and adult family homes display a yellow poster with the Ombudsman Hotline number posted. Our program does its best to visit as many residents and facilities as possible, but we find we don't have enough resources to visit all facilities regularly.
<b>What does a LTC Ombudsman do?</b>	LTC Ombudsmen investigate and resolve complaints on behalf of residents; make regular visits to long term care facilities to educate residents, families and staff about residents rights issues; work to educate the community about residents rights and long term care issues; act as problem solvers when conflicts arise; work to advocate for more resident-focused services and policies and make referrals to other community resources.
<b>Do you only visit facilities when you have a complaint?</b>	No. One of the goals of our local LTC Ombudsman Program is to have a Volunteer Ombudsman assigned to every long term care facility in the County (over 475 facilities!). The idea is to develop relationships and trust, not just to look for problems or complaints. Also, at times residents call on an Ombudsman to discuss private matters that are independent of the services and care received at their facility.
<b>How does someone become a Volunteer Ombudsman?</b>	The LTC Ombudsman Program relies heavily on the work of trained volunteers. These volunteers are community members from a variety of backgrounds and experiences who are dedicated to helping older and disabled persons in long term care. All volunteers are required to complete an application process that includes an interview with members of the LTC Ombudsman Program Advisory Council, reference checks and a Washington State Patrol Background Inquiry. In addition, all volunteers must complete 36 hours of free classroom training before being assigned to a long term care facility. Ombudsmen are then required to attend monthly in-service trainings and to visit their assigned facilities four hours a week.

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<b>Does the LTC Ombudsman Program report all complaints to DSHS?</b>	No. One objective of the program is to try and resolve problems at the lowest possible level - that is we want to work directly with providers and residents (or their representative) to address identified problems. However, if we are unable to reach a resolution, we may refer the complaint to the Department of Social and Health Services if we have resident consent.
<b>Who should I call if about Residents Rights or if I think a resident's rights are being violated?</b>	Call the Snohomish County LTC Ombudsman office at 425-388-7393 or the WA State Ombudsman 800-562-6028. Your DSHS Area Manager can also answer questions related to Residents' Rights at 866-656-4752.
<b>Who should I call if I have a concern about a Volunteer or Regional Ombudsman?</b>	The Regional Ombudsman in Snohomish County is responsible for supervising the work of the volunteers. If you have a question or concern about a volunteer, call the County LTC Ombudsman office at 425-388-7393. We want to know where we need to improve. If you have a complaint about a Regional Ombudsman, please contact the WA State LTC Ombudsman Office at 800-562-6028.
<b>What are the most common complaints the local Ombudsman Program receives about long term care facilities?</b>	Many common complaints we have received include: quality of care concerns, complaints related to transfer/discharge, lack of meaningful activities, concerns about adequate staffing, staffing training and qualifications and food complaints.